

ALASKA PEOPLE

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Teams.

They're cropping up all over. They're changing the way we do our jobs and the way we feel about those jobs. They're making us rethink some of our old habits and customs, adapt them, or in some cases, throw them out. They're redefining what it means to be a supervisor, a natural resource specialist, or a staff assistant. They're teaching us that a person's title isn't as important as what that person brings to the group.

This issue of ALASKA PEOPLE examines how BLM Alaska is using teams to increase efficiency throughout the organization. We've profiled BLM teams from Fairbanks to Glennallen to Anchorage to find out how employees feel about this new way of doing business. What are the advantages? How's it working? How can we improve it? Is training really essential? What's the down side?

Our State Director and Associate State Director support this concept of shared goals and responsibilities. They encourage employees to actively participate in team decisions and tasks, to take risks, to make suggestions, in short, to take ownership.



Teresa McPherson

TEAM FOR A DAY—BLMers help distribute 50th anniversary commemorative calendars to all employees, retirees, and school districts throughout Alaska. I-r: Laura Andrewyuk, Jeff Brune, Lee Koss, Ann Patton and Sharon Dean.

BLM turns 50!

The U.S. Grazing Service and the General Land Office merged July 16, 1946, to form the BLM.

This year BLM celebrates its 50th anniversary. A small team of BLMers has put together a number of events and activities throughout the year that promises to be both fun and educational. Events include brown bag luncheons, historical exhibits, employee/retiree picnics, a Cadastral

Survey remonumentation project, and many others.

Watch for dates and times, and join the fun as we celebrate 50 years of managing Alaska's public lands.



Northern District teams embark on 'new way of business'

BLM team members in the Northern District Office agree, it's a new way of doing business.

A reorganization plan approved by State Director Tom Allen combines three districts into one and sets up nine teams to manage 60 million acres of BLM public land north of the Alaska Range.

Working under the new plan since Oct. 1, 1995, team members in the Fairbanks office building are becoming more comfortable with the team concept.

"We're four months into a several-year process of team development, but we're making progress and I believe that the people on the teams feel positive about them," said Herb Brownell, a team advisor.

The Northern District replaces the former Arctic, Kobuk and Steese/White Mountains districts. Former Arctic District Manager Dee Ritchie was appointed Northern District Manager, and Dick Bouts, former Steese/White Mountains District Manager, is Associate District Manager.

The new teams direct BLM work in the Arctic, Dalton, White Mountains, Steese, Fortymile, Central Yukon and Northwest management areas. An Administrative Support Team serves the resource staff, and a Public Information and Records Team operates the Public Room and maintains BLM land use records. A District Leadership Team includes a representative from each team, the district manager, the associate district manager and a representative from the Public Affairs team.

The teams were designed to increase the level of efficiency and the quality of service to the public. They replace mid-level supervisor positions and put decision-making closer to the people who are doing the work and

working closely with the public users.

"I think it's a better way of doing business," Ritchie said. "As cumbersome as it is, I believe we're getting better decisions out of it."

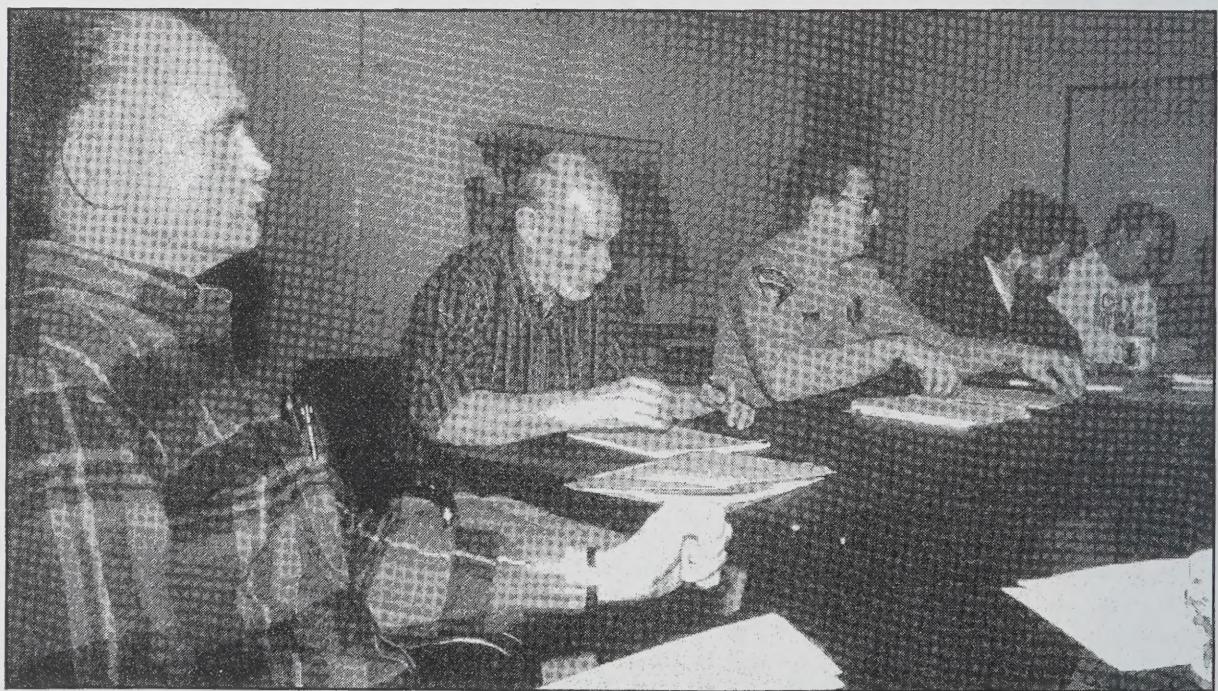
Brownell said the teams are still in the "forming and storming stage," but that team members already recognize positive results. "Perhaps the most important change is an increased sense of shared goals and responsibilities among team members," he said.

The team approach gives members a better idea about what their colleagues are doing. "It gives us a broader perspective of the entire BLM program," said Anne Morkill, team leader for the Northwest Team.

The teams range in size from 5 to 14 members. A team might have a wildlife or fisheries biologist, outdoor recreation planner, natural resource specialist, reality specialist, archeologist, geologist, interpretive specialist and a ranger. Expertise is shared across teams and skills are focused where they are most needed.

The teams make decisions by consensus. "A thumb held up means you approve of a decision," said Dave Mobraaten, team leader for the Central Yukon Team. "Down means you don't approve and will be given a chance to

The Central Yukon Team meets. From left are team leader Dave Mobraaten, Dave Liebersbach, Mike Billbe, Carl Kretzinger and Charles Adkins. Nine new teams have been functioning at the Northern District Office since Oct. 1, 1995, under a reorganization plan.



Andy Williams

discuss why. A thumb held sideways means you're neutral to the decision but you will support it and will not sabotage it.

"Things may move at a slower pace, but people are more comfortable with the outcome," he said.

The position of team leader rotates. Mobraten's and Morkill's teams named leaders for six months initially to provide consistency during the transition; after that, leaders will serve for three months at a time. Elected leaders from other teams will serve one month to one year.

Three team advisors—Brownell, Shelly Jacobson and Susan Will—have taken a year's assignment to help the teams develop processes that will improve working relations and

decision-making.

Each team meets for an hour or two each week. Many members also serve on other working groups, such as wildlife; recreation; soil, water and air; or modernization. "The amount of meeting time has increased substantially under the new system, but it should slacken a little after the teams are up and running smoothly," Morkill said.

Training has been provided in team foundation, conflict management, effective meetings and operating guidelines, with more to come. Team members cite the training and the role of the team advisors as important reasons for successes to date.

"Some of the most valuable

training was in tools for effective meetings. If I go to a meeting now—usually outside the district—that isn't efficiently organized, I get very frustrated," Morkill said.

The teams are currently thrashing out budgets for 1996. Members say determining budget priorities and allocating limited dollars within and among the teams and across a large district for the first time is a challenging task.

"We still get the argument: 'That's not the way we did it in the past. Why can't we do it the old way?'" Mobraten said. "It takes time for the concept to sink in that this is a new way of doing business."

—Andy Williams

Northern "super-team" grapples with budget, priorities

Northern District employees who have been serving on the DLT (District Leadership Team) have found the experience both frustrating and challenging. They are definitely out of their comfort zones.

For Nelda Garrett, land law examiner in the Northern District's public room, serving on the DLT and gaining management and decision-making experience on the DLT has been good. "I never knew how the budget worked before," she said. "We were always told what we could and couldn't spend. Now I can justify to the team why we need certain equipment and training for the Land Information and Records Team."

Over time, everyone in the district will have a turn on the DLT. For most, it will be the first time they have been given the responsibility—and were expected—to make management decisions that affect BLM work in the northern half of Alaska. For two members, district co-managers Dee Ritchie and Dick Bouts, the opposite is true. They act as peers rather than as "bosses" during discussion and voting. As Ritchie says, "This is the first time since grade school I've had to raise my hand to speak."

The DLT was formed to: 1) give direction to BLM work being done in northern Alaska; 2) improve communication among the teams; 3) streamline work, improve efficiency and cut costs district-wide; 4) be a forum for settling unresolved issues within and between teams, and 5) rank BLM projects by priority and spread the budget dollars among those approved.

The DLT has spent the last two months designing a district budget process for FY 96. Members

brainstormed, ranked and refined criteria for decision-making. A subcommittee established then criteria for prioritizing proposed projects. The first round of evaluations sent the majority of proposed projects back to individual teams for further information.

The down side of the process is the amount of time it has taken. The up side, according to Bouts, contains the benefits BLM will reap. "One benefit is that once the process has been defined and applied this year, we'll be able to focus our people and dollars where the priority work is, and we'll be making much better decisions," Bouts said.

"The second benefit is the in-depth analysis each geographic team must do for proposed projects. This includes showing their DLT peers who will benefit from their work, estimating the time it will take to complete the project and the potential for success, and searching for ways to cut costs by sharing equipment, transportation and employees. A third benefit is a budget process that should be faster next year, since teams will know how to present their funding requests.

"And even although I'm listing it fourth, the greatest benefit will be the staff buy-in and support for decisions," Bouts added.

Garrett is looking forward to her teammates taking their turn on the DLT. "At least when the others represent our team they will see how everything fits together," said Garrett, "and they'll develop an appreciation of how the Northern District functions as a whole."

—Sharon Wilson

A Tale of Two Teams

The Survey Data Research Team consists of eleven cartographic technicians who prepare survey data and produce survey plats. The ASO Public Information Center Team consists of seven members, both contact reps and land law examiners, who assist the public with land status information.

Both teams rotate the team lead function on a monthly basis and use a coach as a "silent partner."

Survey Data Research Team



Q. How did you feel when the team concept was first presented to your group?

"Relieved. It's easier for people to cooperate if they participate in the decision making process." —Renee Elliott

"Skeptical." —Val Baca

Q. What are some of the primary differences in the way you do your jobs now as a team?

"Instead of having one person decide who will complete what projects, now the team decides and monitors from beginning to end." —Sam Guim

"More time spent at meetings." —Val Baca

"We talk the project through, discuss problem areas, get different perspectives, plan work flow ourselves. We plan as a team, not as individuals, split up the jobs, pick everybody's brains." —John Spacer

"We have team members with widely varying personalities. So it's important for everyone to feel comfortable and contribute equally in team meetings. As a result, some team decisions take longer."

—John Roberts

Q. What's the down side? It can't be all roses...

"Sometimes we overlook special qualities that an individual team member contributes." —Sam Guim

"Sometimes it's hard to accept different ways of looking at the same thing. Sometimes my ego gets in the way. Sometimes I just don't want to be a team player." —John Spacer

Q. What are some things your team is working on, areas that need improvement?

"How to deal with performance evaluation." —Renee Elliott

"A little more commitment to tasks that team members agree to complete (timeliness). Also communications between various personalities gets touchy, but this gets better with time." —Sam Guim

Q. Would you like to go back to the way you were?

"Not at all. People always do best when they feel they're a part of something, instead of feeling delegated to with no input." —Sam Guim

"No! I've never enjoyed having people tell me what to do and how to do it. I much prefer having people tell me what they need, asking how I can do it, and then together arriving at a product." —John Spacer

Public Information Center Team



"We were all for it." —Janie Fisher

"I welcomed the team concept wholeheartedly." —Jon Pratt

"A supervisor might list ten steps to do something when maybe we could do it in three. That kind of freedom gives you a more relaxed environment. Morale has improved greatly." —Sharon Dean

"YOU make the decision, that's the best part of the whole deal. Before, when you did something good, the boss got the credit." —Alex Mitchell

"I didn't like the structure and control before. We had a lot of stuff delegated to us, while someone else got the glory. Now, when the team is a success, you're a success." —Carol Taylor

"Before, you might have a customer who would say he wanted to see the supervisor. But the supervisor might not know the job." —Janie Fisher

"Teamwork demands more of each of us, but that's not a bad thing." —Jon Pratt

"I think the only down side is the monthly rotation of team leads where once you get into the groove of things, your term is over. And there are times when we're so busy that it's hard to devote the time to team meetings." —Joy Manga

"Making group decisions, like the floor plan. That took a lot of discussion, and we're still working on parts of it." —Janie Fisher

"Not 'no,' but 'heck no!' It was too controlling. I didn't like the games. There's no chance for games now, because people will call you on it." —Sharon Dean

"No, because I like the empowerment we have as a team. We're making the decisions now, not two or three different supervisors." —Peggy Richardson

GMT update

Team looks back at 18 months of self-management

The Glennallen District is unique in that it's the only district that doesn't include a district manager as a member of the district management team. The Glennallen Management Team (GMT) has been fulfilling those responsibilities for the past year-and-a-half. It's an ongoing challenge to meet those responsibilities with a continually shrinking staff. The team has had to adapt basic team management principles to best utilize the skills and stamina of the team members.

The Glennallen Management Team continually examines methods of re-engineering processes as a survival tool in these times of reduced staffs. As much work and authority as possible is delegated to the lowest practical level. Duties that cannot be delegated are shared among team members, including team leadership.

Operating as a management team has its challenges, the group admits. Team member Mike Snively says group decision making isn't easy, and requires "a lot of give and take. But I think we make better decisions as a group. There's more of a sense of ownership once the decision is made."

—KJ Mushovic

State Director Tom Allen presented a Group Achievement Award to the Glennallen Management Team at a Feb. 15 Alaska Leadership Team meeting.

"The Glennallen folks have put a lot of hard work into making this work," Allen said. "They've been creative and willing to try new things. I think their success has helped determine the way we use teams in Alaska, and motivated other teams to try new ideas and methods."



Straight talk on teams and training

Forming strong, productive teams is a piece of cake, right? Wrong! Any one involved in these efforts knows it can be a long and challenging process. But good training can make the process less grueling and more efficient.

Sandy Dunn believes in the value of training, especially during times of organizational change. She spent

"Some [employees] may feel threatened by the idea of working in groups, and fear they will be neutralized in a team environment."

several months researching team training options, which included working with corporate training officers in the private sector, other BLM training officers, and the National Training Center. The result is a comprehensive and flexible training package and a skilled cadre to teach it.

We asked Dunn some tough questions about moving into a team environment and whether effective training can ease this transition:

Why teams in the first place? What's wrong with the way things were?

"Downsizing, loss of expertise, and increasing employee/supervisor ratios mean we have to change the way we work. Teams are a better way to function given the economic conditions we face. Cross-functional,

process oriented teams mean fewer organizational boundaries, and allow greater flexibility and better use of employees."

What are some of the problems you've seen as employees make the transition to teams?

"There's a fair amount of resistance from employees. Many feel this is a phase that will soon pass; if they hold their breath long enough it will go away. They've seen many reorganizations in the past, and they see this as another one with a new name. Some fear change. They see career ladders going away and the potential to be asked to do more work without monetary compensation. Some may feel threatened by the idea of working in groups, and fear they will be neutralized in a team environment.

"Negative attitudes and resistance are by far the biggest obstacles to overcome before a team can move forward."

So how can fledgling teams deal with these issues?

"Team training and enhanced communication among team members is the best way to resolve conflicts. The training package we've developed offers modules to teach group decision making, problem solving, conflict management, communication, trust building, even how to conduct effective meetings."

So where's all this going? And how do we know it's not just a buzz word, like TQM?

"It may be a buzz word, but it's one that's been around for many years. Teams are a way to get to quality management. We were probably ahead of our time when we started TQM efforts some years ago. We started the effort but couldn't follow through because the foundation and critical support just wasn't there. A work force comprised of efficient, interdisciplinary teams is the best foundation to achieve quality resource management. I think we're moving in the right direction."



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"Teaming it" with the Anchorage District

The Anchorage District began its reorganization efforts in October 1995 upon completion of its workload analysis. A reorganization team, consisting of Clinton Hansen, assistant DM for Resources, Bob Lloyd, acting DM for Lands, Lorri Denton, realty specialist, Dave Kelley, natural resources specialist and Danielle Allen, public affairs specialist, briefed the State Director and Associate in January on its reorganization proposal. The team is currently incorporating their concerns into the final proposal, which will be presented to the SD and ASD for approval by the end of February.

The district's leadership team, comprised of the district manager, team leads, teams administrator and programs advisor, will set overall goals and assign work to the teams. The leadership team is not involved with day-to-day operations but focuses on the big picture. Most of the work and decisions occur within the teams, since they will decide how to best accomplish work assigned them. Special emphasis is placed on ad hoc teams who will be formed within and between teams to accomplish specific tasks or projects.

No matter what reorganization proposal is adopted, the positions of teams administrator and programs advisor remain constant for each proposal. The programs advisor is likened to a senior technical advisor who advises the district manager and teams and coordinates and collaborates with others, etc. While the teams facilitator oversees the teams functions and operations and facilitates team proceedings.

The district will begin its team training in March.

—Danielle Allen

Bureau of Mines joins BLM team

On Feb. 2, 1996, our 85-year-old sister agency, the Bureau of Mines, passed away, and more than 1,200 employees were separated in a major Reduction in Force. But 700 employees survived in several locations, including Pittsburgh, Albany (Oregon), and Spokane. In Alaska, the Bureau of Mines function and staff were transferred, along with their property and facilities, to the BLM where they have been incorporated into the Division of Lands, Minerals and Resources.

Don Baggs will serve as the team leader for the eight-member Anchorage (Northern) Mineral Resources team. Currently this team is working on a minerals assessment for the Chugach National Forest. The 11-member Juneau (Southern) team will remain based at its current location on Mayflower Island near Douglas.

"We will be in contact with all the districts and many of the teams to explain our competencies and the work we do," Baggs said. "We have a lot of mineral data, much in GIS format, and want to share the data and help with its analysis for future BLM efforts."

DSD for Minerals, Lands and Resources Nolan Heath says, "These employees will be a valuable source of information for working out solutions to our existing mineral issues and for strategic planning."

Project activities during the early 1990s have included conducting mineral assessments of BLM in the Fortymile and Black River planning units, assessing the impacts of submarine tailings discharge from mining operations, helping conduct a minerals availability investigation of the former Soviet Union, and inventorying mine hazards for the BLM and Forest Service.

—Ed Bovy

Taking care of our own



FOR ME?!—
Margaret McDaniel presents a delighted Connie Ancheta with a prize during a fund-raiser to benefit Conveyances' Danny Dildine. A bake sale and raffle raised over \$1,000 to help Dildine with expenses during his treatment for cancer at a Seattle hospital.



THE ENVELOPE PLEASE—
State Director Tom Allen presents retired Conveyance DSD Wayne Boden with an envelope of employee contributions for the Polar Bear Jump-Off, an annual fund-raiser for cancer research. Boden collected over \$800 in pledges, largely from BLM employees and retirees, before making his annual dive into the frigid waters of Resurrection Bay. He dedicated the event to SD staff assistant Elaine Barankiewicz, who was recently diagnosed with pancreatic cancer.

Christmas in January

It was the best year ever for the Campbell Tract. "We were able to do more for the needy this year than years past," says Shirley Rackley, who played a major role in coordinating CTF's Christmas giveaway. In December, just before the furlough, employees of the Campbell Tract Facility gave 25 turkeys (240 pounds), 65 pounds of toys, 580 pounds of canned food, 165 pounds of used clothes and toys, and three bikes to

the Adopt-a-Family and Giving from the Heart programs.

This is the sixth year CTF employees have given to the needy at Christmas. This year's success is owed mainly to Rackley, Larry Crane, Sandy Smith, Sue Martin and Renee Fencl for planning and coordinating the effort. Their commitment to the less fortunate and their encouragement for CTF's 109 employees to do their share is commendable.

—Danielle Allen

A banner year for BLM

Teresa McPherson



Bill Schorr and Sean Dorman hang a BLM anniversary banner near the elevators on the fourth floor of the Anchorage Federal Building. BLM 50th anniversary activities kicked off in January and will continue throughout the year.

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Editor - Teresa McPherson
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Dear Reader:

Due to staff reductions, your employee newsletter is about to undergo a major change in format. Our goal is to provide you with a shorter, snappier product which will highlight our greatest resource at BLM Alaska: our people. Stay tuned—we think you'll like what you see!



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